

thecollegian TIPOFF GUIDE

tuesday, january 22, 2013

K-STATE VS. KU

Tipoff at 7 p.m., Bramlage Coliseum

By the numbers

Mark Kern

The number of losses between K-State and KU in conference play With both teams undefeated in the Big 12, this is a monster game. The Jayhawks have won at least a share of eight straight Big 12 titles, and, if they win this game, will once again be in the driver's seat for the conference. If K-State can continue their hot streak and gain a victory here, then the Wildcats will be alone at the top of the Big 12

The number of seniors in the Jayhawks' starting lineup
Winning on the road in any conference is extremely difficult. However, having four senior starters that have been through many battles makes this a lot easier to do. These guys have played in tough environments and in a national title, so the atmosphere will not be too big for them.

The number of offensive rebounds per game for For years K-State has been at the top of the Big 12 rebounding, and this year it is no different. The Wildcats lead the Big 12 in offensive rebounds, while the Jayhawks are actually last in the conference with just 10 per game. While the Jayhawks' stats are a little slighted there as they have the best shooting percentage

in the conference, make no mistake about it: the Wildcats must win the battle of the boards. Rodney McGruder's points per game average in Big 12 play At the beginning of the year, McGruder, like his teammates, seemed to be trying to figure out the Wildcats'

new offense. If the last four games are an indication, McGruder has definitely figured this out. McGruder has the complete offensive game, whether it is using the mid-range game, or hitting the trifecta if the defense gives it to him. He will need another big game if K-State is going to get the victory over KU.

The most important player in this game against KÚ: Will Spradling The Wildcats are going to

get the majority of their scor-

ing from their perimeter, as McGruder, Spradling and Angel Rodriguez are the top three scorers on the team. Spradling, after a down year from the field last season, has seen his shooting really improve this season.

Yet, as important as his offense is, it his defense that will be the key against the Jayhawks. With McGruder likely taking KU star Ben Mc-Lemore, Spradling will more than likely be matched up with Travis Releford. Releford is averaging 12.9 points on an impressive 61 percent from the field. Spradling must keep him off the offensive glass and limit him in the fast

Fresh start: Nino Williams on right track after injury-ridden first year



Sophomore forward Nino Williams looks for a shot during the Wildcats' Nov. 12 victory over the Lamar Cardinals in Bramlage Coliseum.

John Zetmeir

Sophomore forward Nino Williams believes that everything happens for a reason. It is hard to find another explanation for the ups and downs that the young man from St. Louis, Mo., has gone through since entering high school.

It was the summer before his sophomore year of high school when Nino Williams heard of an amazing opportunity in Kansas City. A new prep school called Milestone Academy was seeking to recruit Williams along with plenty of other talented youngsters in the area. The school promised free tuition and living expenses, as well as the chance to travel around the country playing basketball at a high level.

"I was going to prep school for the first

semester of my sophomore year, and my parents and all of my coaches figured out that it wasn't really a prep school. It was

kind of a joke," Williams said. A joke, a lie, a scam; it turned out that the academy was not accredited by the NCAA and the basketball was not what the school had promised it to be. When players found out they scrambled to find a new school.

Williams began playing for Spiece Mo-Kan Elite, one of the top basketball programs in the Kansas City area.

When he came to Mo-Kan, he was kind of lost," said Mo-Kan teammate and current K-State teammate Will Spradling. "He didn't really have anyone to look up to, and Mo-Kan put him with a good

It was Mo-Kan coach Matt Suther that introduced Williams to Derek Zeck, a Leavenworth, Kan., native who had a son

"I had met Derek Zeck through Matt Suther," Williams said. "Then I formed a good relationship with Alec."

Suther asked Williams if he wanted the chance to play at Leavenworth and to move in with the Zeck family. Williams' mother was hesitant at first to allow her son to move in with a family that she was unfamiliar with, but in the end it came down to Williams' decision. He decided that he would give it a semester to see whether he liked it. He did, and Leavenworth became his new home.

'He was very athletic but kind of rough in basketball and a little bit raw," said Leavenworth head coach Larry Hogan. "He was ineligible because of the transfer

NINO | pg. 5

Redshirt freshman Ben McLemore emerges as one of KU's top players



When the KU basketball team is under pressure, you would think they'd rely on one of four returning seniors who made it to last season's national title game.

However, it is a redshirt freshman getting the ball at the end of the game. After having to sit out last season due to academics, guard Ben McLemore has emerged as not only the Jayhawks' best player, but one of the very best players in all of college basketball.

On the season, McLemore is averaging 16.4 points and 5.4 rebounds per game.

When the Jayhawks have really needed a basket, Mc-Lemore has taken his game

to an even higher level. With KU in danger of losing its first conference opener since 1991, McLemore hit a game-tying 3-pointer with one second left to send the game into overtime against the Iowa State Cyclones on Jan. 9.

McLemore scored a career-high 33 points and the Jayhawks were able to escape with the 97-89 victory. What makes him even more dangerous? His continued improvement throughout the season.

In his last six games, Mc-Lemore has shot 53 percent (26-of-47) from the 3-point line, including a 6-for-6 performance in the victory over Iowa

His ability to score in so many different ways makes him one of the best in the country. Despite being known for his incredible offensive plays, his defense has been huge for the Jayhawks as well. With senior forward, and the Jayhawks' best defender, Travis Releford in foul trouble on Jan. 6 against the Temple Owls, it was McLemore

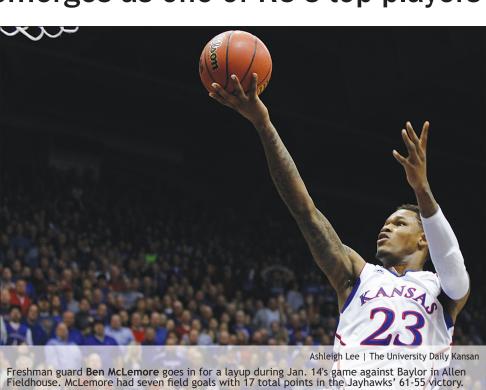
who made the big defensive play to change the game.

Trailing 57-56 with 2:55 left in the game, McLemore was put on the Owls' senior guard Khalif Wyatt, who torched the Jayhawks to the tune of 26 points. McLemore was able to steal the ball and finished the play with a dunk, giving the Jayhawks a lead that they would not relinquish.

To play for a Bill Self coached team you have to be a complete player, and that is absolutely what McLemore is becoming. If you ask any longtime KU fan, the first person they compare him to is Paul Pierce.

Will he go on to have the same type of career that Pierce had? That is yet to be determined. One thing is very clear: if the Wildcats are going to defeat the Jayhawks tonight at Bramlage Coliseum, they must slow down this superstar freshman.

Mark Kern is a senior in print journalism. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.



MATCHING UP K-STATE VS KU





TOP: Senior forward **Jordan Henriquez** passes the ball off to senior guard **Martavious Irving** on Saturday at Bramlage Coliseum. Henriquez blocked three Oklahoma shots and snagged three defensive rebounds to help the Wildcats improve to 4-0 in Big 12 Conference play.

Ashleigh Lee | The University Daily Kansan BOTTOM: Senior center **Jeff Withey** tries to get the ball to the basket during the Jan. 14 game against Baylor in Allen Fieldhouse where the Jayhawks won 61-44. Withey had eight points.

Adam Suderman

Backcourt:

One of the Wildcat's wellknown traits is that, more than likely, the leading scorers are going to change from game to game. With recent wins against top-ranked teams such as Florida and Oklahoma State, that point has been illustrated well. . Junior guard Will Spradling had a season-high 17 points against the Gators and senior guard Rodney McGruder scored 26 of his 28 points in the second half against Oklahoma State.

Add in Angel Rodriguez's performances in non-conference play, and it makes it even more obvious. Facing a Kansas team that has one of the country's top scorers in freshman Ben McLemore will offer the K-State back court plenty of challenges. Senior guards Travis Releford and Elijah Johnson anchor the Jayhawks backcourt and have helped guide Kansas back into the top five nationally. McLemore has yet to find consistency outside of the confines of Allen Fieldhouse and containing him will be imperative for the Wildcats.

EDGE: Kansas

Frontcourt:

The development of Kansas senior center Jeff Withey has been one of the biggest stories in the past three seasons of college basketball. The senior has grown into one of the most productive big men nationwide and, most impressively, stays out of foul trouble better than most players at any position. After pairing with All-American Thomas Robinson one year ago, Withey has worked in the frontcourt with senior forward Kevin Young. Although skilled in multiple areas, Young hasn't offered the Jayhawks as much as recent big men that have moved through the program.

The Wildcats have been using a smaller rotation this season, with senior center Jordan Henriquez and sophomore forward Thomas Gipson as the main contributors. Henriquez has been working as a reserve and that has forced junior forward Shane Southwell to guard multiple positions all around the floor. Withey has the capability of filling the stat sheet in multiple areas, and the Wildcats will have to limit his production.

EDGE: Kansas

Reserves:

In his opening season at

K-State, Weber has spread minutes deep into his bench with 11 players averaging at least 11 minutes per game. The rotation has worked itself down in conference play, but the production of forwards Nino Williams and Jordan Henriquez is crucial to K-State's success moving forward. Both players offer matchup difficulties at their respective positions, and when facing a team as talented as Kansas, playing within their individual roles will be vital.

Kansas will bring three off its bench and the top three reserves of each team will more than likely match up against one another on the floor. Sophomore point guard Naadir Tharpe is third on the team with 41 assists. All three players, Tharpe and freshman forwards Perry Ellis and Jamari Traylor, have faced inconsistencies and the senior experience of the Wildcats will be a determining factor.

EDGE: K-State

Coach:

After replacing Bill Self at Illinois in 2003, Bruce Weber took over an Illini program that Self is credited most with developing. The two coaches were able to face off in the 2011 NCAA Tournament, but with Weber now joining Self in the Big 12 Conference, the matchup will be watched even closer. Self carried an impressive 283-54 resume along with eight straight conference championships into this season, but his record moving forward against Weber will be scrutinized as much, if not more, than any other opposing coach in his Kansas tenure.

EDGE: Kansas

Prediction:

Since an early December loss to Gonzaga, the Wildcats have established an ability to win by any means necessary. They may not all be pretty, but K-State has capitalized and has been able to win. With the program solidifying itself into the top 20, an opportunity to knock off the Jayhawks is available and the Wildcats will get it done. The senior trio of Rodney McGruder, Jordan Henriquez and Martavious Irving will provide the necessary push to give K-State a season-defining win in their final Wildcat campaign.

> FINAL SCORE: K-State 68 Kansas 63





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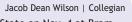
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Big 12 Conference boasts several quality teams other than Kansas





ABOVE: Freshman forward **D.J. Johnson** dunks the ball against Emporia State on Nov. 4 at Bramlage Coliseum. The Wildcats won the matchup 81-51.

UPPER RIGHT: Sophomore forward Thomas Gipson pressures Oklahoma guard Sam Grooms while senior guard Martavious Irving helps to double team Grooms at Bramlage Coliseum on Saturday against the Oklahoma Sooners. The Wildcats defense forced 16 turnovers and had seven steals.

LOWER RIGHT: Senior guard **Rodney McGruder** waits as **coach Bruce Weber** draws up the next play at Bramlage Coliseum on Saturday against the Oklahoma Sooners.



When the experts talk about Big 12 basketball, they most often talk about KU, and it will be very tough for any team to

prevent the Javhawks from winning a ninth straight Big 12 title. However, there are other teams in the league more than capable of making a nice run in the month of March. Here are a look at the teams who could do some damage this season.

K-State:

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The old saying in sports goes, "Offense wins games, defense wins championships." If that is the case, then look for the Wildcats to be there. The

Wildcats currently rank second in the conference in defense, giving up only 57.3 points per game, just two points less than

Much of the same Frank Martin style of play remains at K-State, but now the offense appears to be taking a different approach, and this is largely due to senior guard Rodney McGruder. In the first four Big 12 games, McGruder has averaged 21 points while leading the Wildcats to a 4-0 start in

With McGruder's strong showing and sophomore forward Nino Williams emerging as a second scorer for the team, the Wildcats should only improve as they get deeper into conference play. If the offense can continue to improve like they have the past few games then this team has what it takes to make it to the second weekend in the NCAA

conference play.

tournament.

Oklahoma State:

No team in the Big 12 can quite get out and run like the Cowboys can. With freshman guard Marcus Smart, junior guard Markel Brown and sophomore guard/forward Le'Bryan Nash running the floor, Oklahoma State can take all of the momentum with one

The team's weakness is the lack of inside scoring. Redshirt sophomore forward Michael Cobbins (5.5) and senior center Philip Jurick (3.9) have proved to be inconsistent when it comes to scoring down

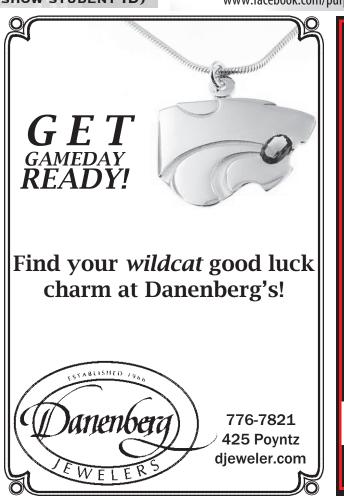
While both players are good when it comes to the defensive end, they must improve their

BIG 12 | pg. 6











Soundoff: Do the Cats have what it takes to defeat in-state powerhouse Kansas?

The K-State and KU's men's basketball teams face off twice a year, but few games between the two in-state rivals have created the anticipation of Tuesday's showdown.

The two teams hold a combined 31-3 record and remain undefeated in the Big 12, making this game a key matchup in determining who has the inside track for the conference championship.

Here is a look at a few members of the Collegian sports staff's predictions on the game.



With former superstars Thomas Robinson and Tyshawn Taylor gone to the NBA for KU, and a change in leadership for K-State, there were questions about both of these teams heading into the 2012-2013 season.

Both teams have stepped up to the challenge, however, and have both been playing terrific basketball. When talking about KU, it starts with Ben McLemore. The only non-senior starting for the Jayhawks, the redshirt freshman continues to get better and better.

In the Jayhawks' 64-59 victory over Texas on Saturday, it was McLemore that made almost all of the plays for the Jayhawks down the stretch. He is the No. 1 priority if the Wildcats are going to pull the upset. K-State has been terrific as of late, and much of that is because of the play of the offense. You always know that the Wildcats are going to play tough defense, but the question is, how much can they score?

Senior guard Rodney McGruder has been on a tear as of late, and is making a case for Big 12 Player of the Year. What worries me is that he may wear down too much guarding McLemore, and thus not be able to put up a lot of points for the Wildcats. This is a tough game to pick as both teams are playing extremely well.

It is hard for me to pick against the eight-time Big 12 champion KU, and I think they make just enough plays down the stretch. My prediction: KU 67, K-State



The last few months have been a great time to be a Wildcat. After the football team's historic season, K-State fans were on cloud nine after watching senior quarterback Collin Klein and company make it to their first BCS bowl.

For Cats' fans, however, the reason to be excited doesn't end with the conclusion of football season. Believe it or not, the men's basketball season has been able to out-shoot, out-rebound and out-play every expectation basketball experts attached to the team.

Senior guard Rodney McGruder has thus far lived up to the pressure of not only being the leader of the relatively young Wildcat lineup, but has also been extremely productive on the court.

Averaging over 15 points and five rebounds per game, McGruder has come up especially big in conference play and big games such as Oklaho-ma State, TCU and Oklahoma.

More so than their offensive power, however, what may enable them to beat the star studded Jayhawks is K-State's intensity on the defensive side of the ball.

K-State as a team has totaled 120 steals in just 17 games, and are also ranked in the top 50 in the nation in rebounding. Containing KU's powerful offense comes down to two things: crashing the boards and creating turnovers, both of which K-State excels at.

Although the Cats aren't exactly known for their offense, they can definitely set the tempo of the game by controlling possession of the ball. The Jayhawks like to score quickly, but K-State can frustrate them by playing the game at a more deliberate tempo.

In what promises to be a close game, K-State feeds off the energy in the Octagon of Doom and pulls off



Bramlage Coliseum has not been the easiest place for the Kansas Jayhawks to simply walk in and get a victory. In the last three meetings in Manhattan, the Jayhawks are 2-1 with both wins being decided by 6 points or less. This year, I think the Wildcats will add another rare win to their tally against the Jayhawks.

There is no surprise that Kansas is a top-5 team; they usually are when they stroll into Bramlage. K-State has already played three top-10 teams this season, going 1-2 in those games, none of which were in Manhattan. K-State has played a much tougher schedule, and I believe that they will be more prepared for the moment than Kansas, who have struggled in two of their first four conference games.

That being said, the keys to the game will be defense and 3-point shooting. With the new motion offense that Bruce Weber has introduced, the Wildcats are getting a lot more shots off from behind the arc. If guys like Rodney McGruder and Will Spradling can each be effective from behind the arc, it will make K-State a tough team to beat.

On the defensive end it will be crucial for senior center Jordan Henriquez to match up well with KU's shot blocking phenom, Jeff Withey. McGruder, Henriquez, Spradling and senior Martavious Irving all played quality minutes on the 2010-11 team that defeated Kansas. It will take a full team effort, but I believe that this is the group that will do it. My prediction: K-State 74. Kansas 67.

Mark Kern is a senior in print journalism, John Zetmeir is a sophomore in journalism and mass communications and Andy Rao is a junior in accounting and finance. Please

send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.



Junior guard Will Spradling shoots a 3-pointer over an Oklahoma player on Saturday at Bramlage Coliseum. Spradling was 3-for-6 behind the arc against the Sooners

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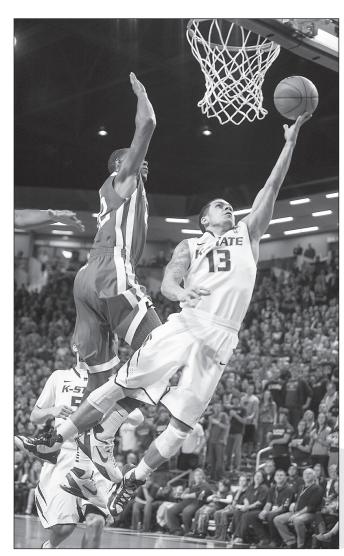


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Rodriguez steps up against Oklahoma with 9 assists, 12 points in 69-60 win over Sooners

Nicolas Wahl staff writer

Big-time players step up and make big-time plays. It's been an adage ever since then-Mi-ami Hurricane football player Santana Moss uttered a similar phrase after stepping up himself. In Bramlage Coliseum on Saturday, Angel Rodriguez, a Miami native and K-State point guard who plays with a confidence that sometimes may seem larger than his ability, added his own chapter to the legacy of the oft-used phrase.

The No. 16 Wildcats had their lead whittled down from 14 points to 7, with 6:24 left to play. OU forward Romero Osby blocked a Rodriguez attempt on a desperate drive on K-State's next possession. Rodriguez, up to that point, had shot just 1-of-11 from the field. He was 0-for-3 from the 3-point range.

Emily DeShazer | Collegian Sophomore guard Angel Rodriguez ducks under an Oklahoma player as he goes in for a layup at Bramlage Coliseum on Saturday. Rodriguez had a dozen points and only one turnover in the 69-60 victory. K-State needed a spark. When the Wildcats got the ball back, the score remained the same, and Rodriguez didn't waste any time extending the K-State lead. He took the ball on an outlet from sophomore forward Thomas Gipson, made his way down the right side of the court and without hesitation moved a step inside the free-throw line and blew past Osby and OU forward Cameron Clark for a score off of the glass, moving the score to 54-45.

After Oklahoma's Steven Pledger and the Wildcats' Will Spradling traded a 3 for a long 2, and two free throws by Amath M'Baye cut the K-State lead to 6, Rodriguez went to the paint again.

This drive was within the framework of K-State head coach Bruce Weber's motion offense. Receiving a pass at the top of the key, Rodriguez turned down a screen from Gipson to the left side, crossed over Oklahoma guard Buddy Hield and drove past a host of Sooner defenders for his second layup in a row, moving the score to 58-50.

Osby answered with a jumper to cut the lead back to 6, but on the ensuing posses-

sion Rodriguez sank his first 3-pointer of the game. The off-the-dribble 23-footer was scored with seven seconds left on the Wildcat shot clock, giving the Wildcats a 9-point lead at 61-52.

The three huge buckets in 3 minutes 43 seconds of game time were vital to holding off OU head coach and K-State alum Lon Kruger's Sooners. However, that isn't to say that Rodriguez wasn't heavenly in other aspects of the game before his shots started falling. He was tough on defense, picking up three steals and frustrating the Sooners by constantly hedging on screens and closely covering OU ball-handlers without a hint of the foul trouble that has plagued him in recent weeks.

He was conscious with the basketball, committing just one turnover and dishing nine assists in 32 minutes of play. Rodriguez recognized the hot hands of teammates Rodney McGruder, Shane Southwell and Will Spradling, who carried K-State's scoring load for much of the game. One of the best team plays was a bigger than a highlight-reel drive, stop, between the legs dribble and dish

to a cutting McGruder, whose reverse layup gave the Wildcats a 64-54 lead with 1:29 to play.

a 64-54 lead with 1:29 to play. Rodriguez celebrated late in K-State's 69-60 win over Okla-

"Big-time players make bigtime plays in big games," was the quote from fellow Miamian, Moss, and it was apt to describe Rodriguez' effort that helped K-State to its 69-60 win over Oklahoma on Saturday.

Rodriguez displayed every ounce of that Miami toughness, that moxie, on Saturday. It's why Louisville head coach Rick Pitino once coveted him on the recruiting trail, why some K-State fans worried that former K-State head coach Frank Martin might take Rodriguez along with him to South Carolina last spring and why Weber has so openly said that the Wildcats need Rodriguez to play well to find success.

With the mammoth Tuesday-night showdown with No. 4 Kansas in Manhattan that will grant one Sunflower State team sole possession of first place in the Big 12 looming, Rodriguez should have ample opportunity to, once again, step up to the challenge at Bramlage Colise-

NINO | Williams 'just fell in love' with K-State, committed to program early

Continued from page 1

rule his sophomore year. He practiced with the team, came to practice everyday and practiced very hard — competed every day in practice, but he was able to play then his junior and senior year."

Williams quickly became a standout player at Leavenworth High School. In his first season, he led the Pioneers in

both scoring and rebounding.

"You could just see with his athletic ability, his intensity and his desire to be successful, that he had potential," Hogan said.

Williams wasted no time deciding where he would play college basketball. He made an early commitment to K-state in his junior season.

"I committed super early," Williams said. "I liked K-State. I came down here, I knew a couple of guys and I kind of just fell in love. Everybody was cool. I liked how it wasn't too far from Leavenworth, not too far from St. Louis, and I decided early that I liked this place."

With the recruiting process out of the way, Williams had nothing else to worry about his senior year besides school and basketball. As in his junior year, Williams led Leavenworth in both scoring and rebounds during his senior year, leading the Pioneers to the Kansas 6A state semi-finals where they lost to state champion Wichita Heights.

The accolades poured in for the Leavenworth senior. He earned the title of Mr.

Kansas Basketball, was rated a four-star recruit by Rivals.com and was ranked in the Rivals Top-150 for his class. However, Williams' freshman year at K-State did not go as well as the highly-touted recruit planned.

In his first year on campus, former head coach Frank Martin decided to redshirt Williams after he suffered a number of concussions. In his freshman season, Williams saw limited game time playing in only 12 total games with an average of just over six minutes in those games. His best game came on Jan. 14, 2012, at Oklahoma where he scored 12 points and grabbed nine rebounds in a loss.

"It was hard, because coaches usually told me certain things like 'I should be playing, I should be starting,' but I didn't really see much action," Williams said. "I did in Big 12 play, but then I got hurt and then I really didn't play after that."

In the offseason, Martin left K-State for a the head coaching position at South Carolina, and former Illinois head coach Bruce Weber was hired.

"After the coaching switch, I thought that it would benefit everybody in a way because Bruce Weber is a good coach and he had a good resume," Williams said. "I never had doubts about the new coaching staff."

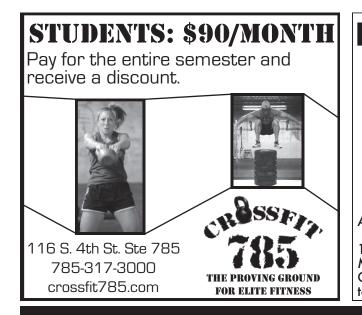
From day one, the new coaching staff proved positive for Williams. As a standout in K-State's summer trip to Brazil, Williams quickly grabbed the staff's attention. In K-State' season opener Williams found himself in the starting lineup for the first time in his career, finishing with three points and five rebounds in a win over North Dakota. Through 15 games this season, Williams has averaged 17.1 minutes of play per game and has played in all but one game due to injury.

"We played everybody in Brazil. That was our time to evaluate people and that's when we were learning what he could do for us and what his skill level was," said assistant coach Chris Lowery. "He's the kind of person that we don't have to run plays for for him to be successful."

m to be successiul. Williams has scored over 16 points in two of his last three games, including a career-high 17 points in K-State's Big-12 Conference opener against Oklahoma State. It was no easy task, but it appears that Williams has solidified his role in this year's squad.

"Tve seen Nino grow tremendously," said senior forward Jordan Henriquez. "When I was a sophomore he came in as a freshman, and he had high expectations, being Mr. Kansas Basketball. It didn't work out right away. He got hurt a few times. But most guys get hurt. Usually they try to recover and get back into it right away, but he took his time and now it's his turn. And he's doing a great job with the opportunity that he's given."

kstate collegian









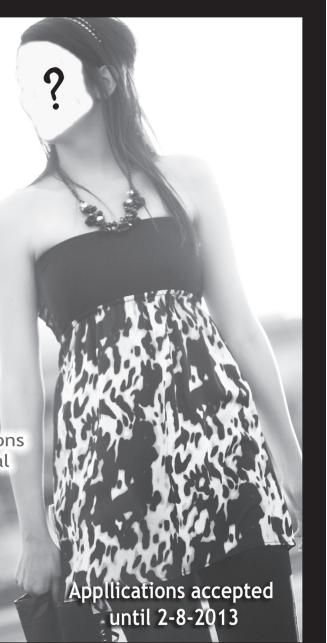
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Cats have everything to gain when KU comes to town



There will be a lot at stake on Tuesday evening at Bramlage Coliseum when the No. 16 K-State men's basketball team takes on in-state rival No. 4 Kansas.

The Jayhawks, led by freshman phenom Ben McLemore, are once again the team to beat in the Big 12 Conference. They've won 15 straight games since falling to No. 18 Michigan State, their only loss of the season, including a victory over then-No. 7 Ohio State in

KU is 4-0 in the Big 12 so far, and the only game that was competitive was an overtime thriller on the road against Iowa State on Jan. 9.

The Wildcats, under first-year head coach Bruce Weber, have quietly made their way into the top 20, picking up big wins against then-seventh ranked Florida and then-No. 22 Oklahoma State. K-State's only two losses came against top-10 teams, No. 8 Gonzaga and then-No. 4 Michigan.

Senior guard Rodney McGruder has become a consistent scoring threat after a somewhat slow start, and with Weber's "starting eight" philosophy players like sophomore forward Nino Williams, junior guard Shane Southwell and sophomore forward Thomas Gipson have had the opportunity to contribute as well.

Despite their solid start to the season, the Wildcats haven't generated much attention on a national scale. In the AP Poll, K-State, at 15-2, is ranked behind six other schools with two losses, including Florida. Florida not only lost to K-State, but has a less impressive record at 14-2. The USA Today Coaches Poll has the Wildcats ranked 18th, nine spots behind the Gators

ESPN's bracketologist Joe Lunardi projects K-State as a seventh seed in the NCAA Tournament, while giving Kansas a top seed. When Bill Self leads Kansas into the Octagon of Doom on Tuesday, everyone outside of the Little Apple will expect him to leave with

K-State isn't supposed to stand a chance against their mighty rivals



Jacob Dean Wilson | Collegian

Senior guard Rodney McGruder drives for a shot over USC Upstate sophomore forward Babatunde Olumuyiwa during the Wildcats' 72-53 victory over the visiting Spartans on Dec. 2 in Bramlage Coliseum. McGruder has averaged 21.5 points per game since Big 12 play started, with the Wildcats going 4-0 during that stretch.

from the cost

No one will be surprised if KU rolls through their Big 12 schedule undefeated, wraps up a number one or two seed in the NCAA Tournament and makes a Final Four run, because that's what KU does.

In short, the Jayhawks have nothing to gain, and everything to lose. The Wildcats, on the other hand, have everything to gain. If the Cats can make some magic happen next week they would put themselves in an excellent position to end KU's Big 12 title run at eight straight.

straight.

After the Kansas schools, the conference isn't exactly formidable, boasting no other ranked teams since Oklahoma State dropped out after losing to the

Furthermore, with another top-10 win, the nation would be forced to pay attention to K-State. Beating the fourth-ranked team in the nation is a big deal, and it should propel the Cats into the top 10

Needless to say, beating a projected one-seed would do wonders for the Wildcats' postseason resume. A win would likely put K-State in the running for a three or four seed, which would give them a much easier shot at a deep tournament run. It will take quite a showing from K-State to vanquish the Jayhawks. Seven-foot center Jeff Withey, whose enormous wingspan makes him one of the premier shot blockers in the country, will present a challenge on the boards for 6-foot-11-inch Jordan Henriquez and 6-foot-7inch Gipson.

The KU frontcourt of senior point guard Elijah Johnson, Mc-Lemore, and senior guard Travis Releford, all taller than 6-foot-4-inches, will be a tough matchup for K-State's McGruder (6-foot-4-inches), junior guard Will Spradling (6-foot-2-inches) and sophomore guard Angel Rodriguez (5-foot-11-inches).

It won't be easy, but if the Wildcats can play the gritty, lockdown defense they brought in their upset of a much larger Florida team and use the atmosphere of a packed Bramlage Coliseum to their advantage, they could give K-State students one heck of a welcome back present on the first day of the spring semester.

Mike Stanton is a freshman in journalism and mass communications. Send comments to *sports@kstatecollegian.com*.

Check out the

BIG 12 | Teams feature dynamic, consistent scorers

Continued from page 3

scoring if this team is going to reach its full potential. If the posts can provide the scoring to complement the Cowboys' perimeter play, this team has the ability to play with any team in the country.

Iowa State:

The Cyclones showed what they can do this season, coming within a second of defeating Kansas in Lawrence on Jan. 9 before falling in overtime. Despite the loss, the team has bounced back and won their last three conference games.

The Cyclones are one of the most prolific scoring teams in the country; they were the only team to score 70 points in every game until their 63-50 victory over TCU on Saturday. With redshirt senior guards Korie Lucious, Chris Babb and Will Clyburn forming a dynamic trio, the Cyclones have as much firepower as any team in the Big 12.

The key for them will be how well they defend, and if they can hang with opposing teams on the boards. With only two players standing at 6 feet 9 inches tall, the Cyclones are one of the smaller teams in the Big 12. This will be something Iowa State must compensate for if they are going to make it to the NCAA tournament, which they have the potential to do.

Baylor:

Any time you have as much talent as the Bears do, you have a chance to make some noise come tournament time. Behind senior point guard Pierre Jackson's league-leading 19 points per game and one of the best freshmen in the country in center Isaiah Austin, the Bears have an inside-outside scoring duo that is as good as any in the nation.

However, if the Bears have had a weakness in the past, it's not playing up to the talent level they possess. The key to this team is junior guard Brady Heslip, a sharp-shooter who really turned it on in Baylor's run to the Elite Eight last year. The Bears have the talent to contend with teams at the very top of the Big 12, but they must rebound after getting beat up in Lawrence 61-44 on Jan.14.

Oklahoma

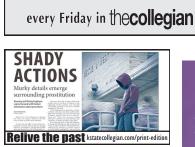
Former Wildcat and head coach Lon Kruger has his team playing great basketball and off to a terrific start (12-4, 3-1 Big 12). One of the main reasons for the Sooners' improvement is the play of senior forward Romero Osby, who scored 17 points in the Sooners 77-68 victory over in-state rival Oklahoma State on Jan. 12.

Unlike the Baylor Bears, the Sooners get the most out of their talent, which is a compliment to their coach. Despite a record under .500 last season, there were signs that the Sooners were righting the ship. First off, they defeated K-State in both games and nearly upset the then-No. 4 Missouri at home. This season they are turning those close games into victories, and at this point they appear to be on their way to the NCAA tournament.

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